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COMBATING TERRORISM VIA THE WOMB:

EMPOWERING IRAQI WOMEN

by

Leigh C. Matanov, Maj, USAFR

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Advisors:  Basma Abdul-Hamid, and Col Brett Morris, Ph.D.

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# *Preface*

On one of my deployments to Iraq, I was part of the "capture" and "kill" efforts to help deteriorate the seemingly never ending terrorist networks. However successful or unsuccessful our coalition efforts were in Iraq, it forced me to think of non-kinetic ways to help stem the spread of terrorism. I believe that the current U.S. war on terrorism cannot be won solely via kinetic means. We are presently fighting a war of ideology, and it appears that a peaceful religion, Islam, is hijacked by a minute fraction of Muslims who twist their interpretations of their faith to excuse and promote acts of terrorism.

As a woman, I would reach out to the few Iraqi women I was able to meet during my first deployment to Iraq. I learned early on about the ugly impact of war on their lives since the U.S. re-attacked Iraq in 2003. One lady I knew cleaned U.S. military members' "homes" in Baghdad as well as made money as a prostitute; unbeknownst to her husband and children at home. Iraqi women are forced to help keep the family together during uncertain times.

This topic was something that I have thought of for a while and finally had the opportunity to write on while attending Air Command and Staff College. I want to thank my instructors Basma Abdul-Hamid and Col Brett Morris for their unique insights into the Middle East as well as their support while I engaged this topic. I firmly believe that women in the Middle East are priceless assets towards positive change in the region.

## *Abstract*

Would the empowerment of Iraqi women help counter terrorism? This paper explores an asymmetric, non-kinetic approach to help counter terrorism, which may require years and possibly generations to judge the results; however, with all the challenges faced by the U.S. as the U.S. continues to focus on the "Overseas Contingency Operation" against terrorism, why not explore the possibility. The research method used for this paper is the problem/solution method. The problem examined is the social status of Iraqi women stemming from the fallout of the 2003 Iraq war, and the possible benefits from the empowerment of women to help counter extremism. An Iraqi mother who is afforded access to an education, job training, and micro-lending programs, may raise children who follow in her footsteps; thereby growing up to become productive members of society versus engage in criminal or extremist type activity ripe for terrorism. This paper will explore possible solutions to help stem both the short- and long-term impact of extremist ideology and attacks in Iraq, while the Iraqis, the U.S., allies, NGOs, IGOs, and industry engage in nation building and lay the foundation for a viable and secure Iraqi state.

# Combating Terrorism via the Womb: Empowering Iraqi Women

It is a persistently methodical approach and steady pressure which will gradually wear the insurgent down. The government must not allow itself to be diverted either by countermoves on the part of the insurgent or by the critics on its own side who will be seeking a simpler and quicker solution. There are no short-cuts and no gimmicks.

—Sir Robert Thompson
Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam, 1966[1]

The problem examined is the social status of Iraqi women stemming from the fallout of the United State's 2003 war with Iraq, and the possible benefits from the empowerment of women to help counter extremism. This paper will explore solutions to help stem both the short- and long-term impact of extremist ideology and attacks in Iraq, while Iraq, the U.S., allies, Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and private industry engage in nation building and lay the foundation for a viable and secure Iraqi state. This paper addresses challenges faced by Iraqi women, initiatives to help counter extremism via empowering Iraqi women, the status of Iraqi women since the 2003 U.S. invasion, support for Iraqi women's economic status, and concludes with recommendations.

## Struggles Faced by Iraqi Women through the Empowerment Process

### Tight Constructs Impacting an Iraqi Woman's Way of Life

Middle Eastern women are the first to impact their own empowerment. With the support from family they help raise children, are dutiful wives, and many pursue an education and work. However, like women around the world, there are numerous social, cultural and religious issues which greatly impact their way of life. Local, tribal and religious customs and rules help shape and define the roles of women.[2] As an example, Middle Eastern women tend to hold the burden of having the weight of her family's honor and reputation on her shoulders as the family upholds the behavioral standards expected by society.[3]

Middle Eastern women are an underutilized resource in part by limits placed on them by a government, society, customs and religion.[4] Moroccan author Mernissi believes that for women in the Middle East, "only the university and education provided a legitimate way out of mediocrity."[5] Typically the father determines the educational level the children would receive and the occupations his sons would enter.[6] The senior male in the family is normally the head of the family and the final arbiter of decisions; however, females greatly influence the decision-making within the home.[7]

Women are much more powerful than their outward appearances portray to westerners, and it is incongruous to stereotype the Iraqi women as powerless. The status of Iraqi women cannot be typecast or generalized because of the numerous social factors, to include economic standings, which affects a woman's options in life. Women throughout the Middle East are divided ideologically and politically.[8] Some women may reject tradition, customs, and religion, which other women fully embrace.[9]

Perhaps Iraqi women can wage their own jihad against terrorist acts stemming from their homes and community. Author Geraldine Brooks claims, "In the Western mind, Jihad has become synonymous with acts of terrorism carried out by extremist Islamic groups. But teaching the faith and/or spreading the word through an exemplary life are also forms of jihad."[10] Would a woman seeking to enroll in school or training in an effort to gain a better job be considered a good Muslim leading an exemplary life? Another question is how much will society allow for Iraqi women to seek an education, receive training, and engage in micro-lending in an effort to attain fruitful employment. An additional question will be if the extended family is able to help raise the mother's children while mom pursues the aforementioned initiatives.

Wars tend to shape new roles for the women of Iraq. The violence conjured from the current Iraq war has triggered a phenomenon where in some households women have been forced to be the breadwinners of the family. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs highlighted in July 2007 the impact of violence in Iraq causing a "gender role swap" as men were forced to hide in their homes due to threats, and the wives were forced to take on the traditional male roles.[11]

> **Figure 1: Micro-Credit/Micro-Lending Programs Explained**
>
> "Micro credit is a financial innovation that originated in developing countries where it successfully enables extremely impoverished people to engage in self-employment projects. This in turn allowed them to generate income and in many cases begin to build wealth and exit poverty."
>
> [http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=195571&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16#]

During the Iraq-Iran war, women joined the workforce out of necessity, and a similar shift appears to have taken place in Iraq since the onset of the most recent conflict with the United States.[12] However, in the 1980s the Iraqi government, despite its support for women in the workforce also declared the necessity to increase birth rates, which ultimately discouraged women from retaining jobs unless she had significant extended family support.[13]

Women in the U.S. during World Wars I and II galvanized together to join the workforce for the good of the nation and managed to eventually break through glass ceilings and social norms as many maintained an income versus go back to being stay-at-home mothers. The Iraqi women, whom out of necessity joined the workforce, may opt to maintain their jobs out of concern over having food on the table and to better their economic status. Some women may relish the sense of accomplishment and new found freedoms associated with successfully facing new challenges and earning a paycheck.

Those who seek an excuse to subjugate women need to be reminded of the life of the Prophet Muhammad who supported a woman's right to work. During the life of the Prophet

Muhammad, women were afforded a prominent role in society beyond traditional roles of mother and a dutiful wife. The following quote is specific to Muslim wives and highlighted in Clans chapter of the Koran, "O wives of the prophet, ye are not like any ordinary women."[14] Muhammad's wife Sawda, "famed for her fine leather-craft, had worked to contribute to the household's budget."[15] Muhammad's other wives were warriors in the sense that they went to battle alongside of their Prophet.[16]

## An "Asymmetric-type" Initiative to Help Counter Extremist Threats – Empower Iraqi Women

Would the empowerment of Iraqi women help counter terrorism? With all the challenges faced by the U.S. as the U.S. continues to focus on terrorism via the newly termed "Overseas Contingency Operation," why not explore the possibility? As Iraq, the U.S., allies, IGOs, NGOs, and private industry engage in nation building, efforts towards the empowerment of Iraqi women may help stem extremism and crime, which may ultimately help counter terrorism. Iraqi mothers may help to elevate the household income if they are afforded access to opportunities like an education, job training, and micro-lending programs. A child, while following in mom's footsteps, may seek an education and engage in a favorable work ethic, thereby growing up to become a productive member of society and refraining from engagement in criminal or extremist type activity which may transform into acts of terrorism. Therefore by a mother raising good children, she raises a nation.[17]

The architects of the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM) 3-24 recognize the power of a woman, and how she can help determine the fate of her nation. The U.S. has the power to help influence her decision-making. General David Petraeus, as one of the architects of

the Counterinsurgency FM 3-24, addresses in an appendix how women can effectively be a part of counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts:

> Most insurgent fighters are men. However, in traditional societies, women are hugely influential informing the social networks that insurgents use for support. When women support COIN efforts, families support COIN efforts. Getting the support of families is a big step toward mobilizing the local populace against the insurgency. Co-opting neutral or friendly women through targeted social and economic programs builds networks of enlightened self-interest that eventually undermine insurgents. Female counterinsurgents, including interagency people, are required to do this effectively.[18]

The current "capture" and "kill" efforts in Iraq, although necessary at times, in the long run will not eliminate extremist ideology nor destroy all terrorist networks. The current U.S. "Overseas Contingency Operation" cannot be won via kinetic means and needs an asymmetric-type approach to help stem the spread of terrorism. The U.S. is fighting a war of ideology, and it appears that a peaceful religion, Islam, is hijacked by a minute fraction of Muslims who

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**Figure 2: Counterinsurgency (COIN)**

"COIN is an extremely complex form of warfare. At its core, COIN is a struggle for the population's support. The protection, welfare, and support of the people are vital to success. Gaining and maintaining that support is a formidable challenge. Achieving these aims requires synchronizing the efforts of many nonmilitary and HN [host nation] agencies in a comprehensive approach." "Increasing the number of people who feel they have a stake in the success of the state and its government is a key to successful COIN operations."

[COIN Field Manual 3-24, 1-28; 1-25]

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twist their interpretations of their faith to excuse and promote acts of terrorism.

Iraqi women are forced to help keep the family together during uncertain times. Due to war, some Iraqi women are left widowed and need to learn how to put food on the table each day. According to the deputy head of Iraq's Parliamentary Committee for Women's and Children's Affairs, Nadira Habib, there is an estimate of a million Iraqi widows due to women losing their husbands in war or internal violence over the past three decades.[19] Lawmaker and activist Maissoon al-Damalogi cautioned that "if these families were not supported the whole

society could fall apart."[20] She recommends they be "rehabilitated and trained to work in many fields; to be useful and productive in society."[21] The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in April 2008 posted a report highlighting how helping widows in Iraq "find jobs would also be a boon for the economy as many of them depended solely on either the government or relatives for financial support."[22] An independent women's activist Salama Simaisim highlights, "We have to teach them how to fish, not give them fish to eat….The government's support should not be just financial but should include training programmes [sic] to help women find jobs in the public and private sectors."[23] She highlights the need for rehabilitation centers for those who abandoned their jobs and are seeking jobs versus simply having women be dependent on government handouts.[24]

Conventional approaches to rebuilding Iraq and circumventing future hostilities, stemming from crime and extremist acts, need a boost from unconventional methods. Counterinsurgency FM 3-24 provides a list of considerations for developing essential services needed by the host nation, with the following consideration included on the list: "Consider the role of women in the society and how this cultural factor may influence these activities."[25] Iraqi women can help improve the economic growth of their nation and help improve their own standards of living by gaining an education and joining the work force. In a volatile society, Iraq needs hope that future generations will continue to seek the betterment of their country. In the book "Women and Nation-Building," the authors postulate that "women in Afghanistan are one of the greatest potential sources of peace and security"[26] for their nation. The same sentiment rings true with Iraqi women. They can help to stabilize and bolster their nation.

**A Mother Raising Children to Become Productive Members of Society**

During the current reconstruction efforts, it behooves the U.S. government to help elevate the status of Iraqi women. The careful implementation of education, training, and micro-lending programs at both the grassroots and national levels could help empower Iraqi women, which may in turn produce positive outcomes for both Iraq and the United States. One possible outcome may be that women who are afforded opportunities to contribute financially towards the wellbeing of their families, may inspire children to grow up and emulate their actions, thereby avoiding an impoverished lifestyle and hopefully becoming productive members of society. If the mother's children decide to seek an education and a job, they may avoid engaging in criminal, extremist and/or terrorist type activity as they follow in her footsteps.

A common fear in insurgencies is that the insurgents have easy access to unemployed, disenfranchised youth. Osama Bin Laden highlights that "people between the ages of 15 and 25 are the segment that can contribute and engage in jihad…we have no one else to turn to after Almighty God except the youths, who have not been burdened by the problems of the world."[27] FM 3-24 warns that, "Without a viable economy and employment opportunities, the public is likely to pursue false promises offered by insurgents."…"Insurgencies attempt to exploit a lack of employment or job opportunities to gain active and passive support for their cause and ultimately undermine the government's legitimacy."[28] A mother has direct influence over her children and can help steer her children down a different path. In Afghanistan, women have organized protests, signed petitions in an effort to combat threats, and called for the disarmament of militias, estimated at 100,000 men.[29]

**A Long-Term Strategy to Stem Extremism is Needed – Plant Seeds Now**

I acknowledge there will be numerous exceptions and counterarguments to this proposal; however, it is a process which may prove to be successful and could potentially impact other nations in the world who are threatened by terrorism. The attempt to "counter terrorism via the womb" is an ambitious, asymmetric approach to countering threats, which will take time to determine the outcome; however, it is worth the effort; especially if it can help eliminate poverty while further empowering Iraqi women. The key to the success of initiatives supporting Iraqi women is to gain popular support to include Iraqi national leadership, tribal elders and heads of households.



**Picture 1: Young Girl to Attend School Built in Muthanna Province by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Subcontractors.** [https://www.rebuilding-iraq.net/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PCO_CONT ENT/HOME/DOWNLOADS/HBP_IRAQ_ EDUCATION.PDF]

Beyond a mother's impact of raising more productive members of society, she may simply via her efforts, help her family avoid an impoverished lifestyle and subsequently become more materialistic. Perhaps her children will grow up to value "more stuff," as do westerners, as an incentive to continue to work and a reason to live. Conceivably if an Iraqi family is afforded the opportunity to work towards a certain level of quality of life, then they may continue to do their best to sustain that type of lifestyle each generation; if not better their economic standings in society. Much like people growing up in poverty, often times

it is very difficult to break the poverty cycle unless people are afforded opportunities for change.

An Air Command and Staff College classmate from Kuwait, Major Mohammad Alqadfan, highlighted in class that a good woman can build a nation.[30] Author Valentine Moghadam notes that, "Political conflict or war can also bring about social change, including change in the economic and political status of women, a heightened sense of gender awareness, and political activism on the part of women."[31] Moghadam notes how through education and employment, "Women become active members of society, organize and mobilize themselves, make demands on governments and employers, and advance modernization and democratization."[32] In the December 2006 findings from the U.S. Army War College's Letort Papers on "Iraq, Women's Empowerment, and Public Policy," the Director of the Strategic Studies Institute, Douglas Lovelace highlights that, "Along with an increased political presence, legal reforms together with educational and employment opportunities have been the planks of women's changing status throughout the Middle East. How these are resolved will speak to the success of policy concerning women in Iraq."[33]

The U.S. State Department, under former Secretary Condoleezza Rice's direction and former President George W. Bush's guidance, had hoped that once the Iraqi women are engaged in creating a strong, sustainable civil society, they will have a more viable role in society and will serve as examples for future generations.[34] The State Department is working very closely with and through NGOs to devise and implement programs which support Iraqi women in the long-term. The organization recognizes that "women are the catalysts for change in their society."[35] The U.S. State Department's Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues has been implementing a $24.5 million Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative

since 2004 by working through U.S. NGOs in Iraq to help train women to be a viable part of the political and economic fabric of society and possible future leaders.[36]

One State Department program *Women as Agents of Peace* announced in July 2008 that it will focus on women and peace-building in an effort to strengthen women's capacity to work together against violence and hate in their communities.[37] The grassroots are Iraqi women already engaged in peace-building initiatives in Iraq via NGOs or independently and women who desire to engage in peace-building programs in Iraq.[38] The State Department hopes, "this project will build conflict resolution skills and help women-focused organizations to design, expand, and oversee projects to steer children away from violence and towards participation in sports, youth centers and school."[39] This project will encourage new peace initiatives, learn what has worked in other countries, and will help build a support network of like-minded participants.[40]

**Roles in Supporting Iraqi Women and How it Could Work**

Empowerment of female Iraqis, via education, training, and micro-lending programs, will necessitate a whole of government approach, much of which is already in progress in Iraq. Simultaneous efforts at the grassroots and national levels are needed to gain Iraqi societal and government support, buy-in and ownership, which are key to a woman's empowerment program's success, strength and longevity. It requires the U.S. working closely with the Iraqi government, allies, and at times adversaries in order to garner support for the Iraqi women. If Iraqi leadership openly supports and condones issues such as females' rights to a good education and jobs, such pursuits may be deemed more favorable and acceptable by Iraqi citizens.

In the book "Women and Nation Building" the authors, "encourage those involved in nation-building to focus on creating a clear institutional understanding of their goals with regard to women that is transparent to outside parties and national actors alike."[41] In order for

educational, training and micro-lending programs to be effective in the long-term, Iraq will need both governmental and community level buy-in to support the advancement of females in their society. In addition, nation builders should encourage men and women to work side-by-side while making decisions at all levels of society to include areas typically dominated by men."[42]

While Iraq is immersed in its recovery stage, nation builders can greatly influence the long lasting success of the promotion of women issues by educating and encouraging the men to want to choose economic advancement via the empowerment of their women. Programs in Iraq can gain better traction at the grassroots level if respected local leaders in the community openly support the programs. Religious and tribal elders and the heads of households in more conservative, traditional neighborhoods need careful persuasion to support such initiatives. Stemming from Saddam Hussein's secular versus Islamic leanings and in response to war with Iran, Iraqi women were afforded opportunities to work and receive an education.[43] However, Iraqi women are challenged by traditional roles, religious conservatism and religious interpretations of the constitution, and may be deemed as second-class citizens. Therefore, when discussing initiatives impacting women and the overall family constructs, it is helpful and imperative to gain the support of Iraqi men who are normally the head of the house, community, tribe, and nation. Selling points may include economic prosperity for the family and country or simply in comparison and in competition with the various ethnic or religious sects and tribes. Supporting the opportunity for females to receive training to help her gain the necessary skills to compete for jobs may be advertised out of financial necessity or even financial prosperity. Another selling point is stability and less violence with males and females off the streets either at work or at school.

In an effort to gain support and maintain legitimacy with the Iraqi people, the face of these efforts should be Iraqi and not the United States, and the programs should avoid any suspicion of possible hidden agendas. The U.S. government will have to continue working with and through NGOs and private industry to help fund and man the support needed to help strengthen the roles of Iraqi women. Via joint efforts, to include partnerships with international organizations, prioritized objectives can be determined and supported more effectively with an increase in resources and better deconfliction and networking. Funding for government initiatives may by bolstered by another pool of financial support; money used in support of counterterrorism measures. For example, the U.S. State Department can focus on improving the educational standards of Iraqi women and helping with job placements in order to establish an example for children to follow, thereby keeping them off the streets with a different focus.

Allied states can greatly influence and support programs favoring women via highly advertised forums held in Iraq and abroad. The discussions, ideas, and opportunities can be advertised via the numerous media outlets and through word-of-mouth from grassroots organizations led by Iraqi women. In April 2008, the Women's Leading Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace discussed women's empowerment issues with the Dialogue of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.[44] The joint panel concluded "that on-going women's rights efforts require a combination of grass-roots campaigning, professional education and training for women, economic aid for participatory campaign fees, and lobbying of governments."[45]

The U.S. State Department, under the George W. Bush administration was supportive of women's empowerment in Iraq.[46] However, it was troublesome trying to interpret and discern clearly the U.S. policy on the 'empowerment' of Iraqi women and how to go about it.[47] The U.S.

promotes women's freedom and supports Iraqi women's rights as an issue which is conducive to long-range U.S. interests for not only Iraq but for the region.[48] With newly elected President Barak Obama in power, he is more than likely to continue to support similar initiatives with hopefully a clear focus on how the U.S. defines empowerment for the Iraqi women.

The U.S. State Department highlights their initiatives to help the Iraqi women via economic aid and supports projects led by NGOs. However, in the December 2006 Strategic Studies Institute publication "Iraq, Women's Empowerment, and Public Policy" Sherifa Zuhur highlights that there are discrepancies between the manner the U.S. State Department and NGOs are pursuing their initiatives in Iraq.[49] The programs are neither Iraq centric nor solely based on women's issues and the organizations.[50] In addition, there needs to be more coordination between those engaged in economic initiatives, and the organizations need to work in concert to enhance women's political and legal rights.[51] Since the 2006 publication, the U.S. State Department appears to have refocused its Iraq centric issues via joint initiatives with NGOs and private industry.

## Status of Iraqi Women since the 2003 U.S. Attack in Iraq

**Obstacles Faced Since Regime Change – Status of Rights Pre and Post Invasion**

Iraqi women faced empowerment obstacles even prior to March 2003.[52] The fallout from the eight-year Iraq-Iran war and the economic boycott years left large numbers of widowed women, which negatively impacted society as resources reduced and unemployment increased.[53] Subsequently, seeking employment for food on the table became more of a priority over finishing an education, and as the economy eroded, so did the education system.[54] Some young women married older men out of financial necessity and young couples found it more difficult to marry.[55]

A key indicator of Iraq reconstruction success will be the empowerment of Iraqi women. There are concerns that Iraqi women will not retain the rights they enjoyed in the past.[56] Some of these concerns stem from fear that Islamic law, shari'a, could set back the legal status of equality for women simply based on gender, religious and ethnic affiliations.[57] Following the Baathist revolution in the 1950s, as part of political indoctrination efforts, Iraqi women were granted political and social rights and were encouraged to seek an education and join the work force.[58] Iraq went as far as to implement the "1978 personal status law, although limited in its objectives, aimed at reducing the control of extended families over women."[59] However, the onset of the Iraq-Iran war toughened Iraq's position on women by directing them to fill work positions as the men fought, created travel restrictions, and in 1986 birth control was scarce to find as the state competed with Iran over birth rates.[60]



**Picture 2: "A widow and her child stood in a trailer doorway at Al Waffa trailer park. There are an estimated 740,000 widows in Iraq, a result of devastating wars, insurgencies and sectarian violence that have ravaged the country. The park is located in Shaab, a Shiite neigborhood [sic] on the northeastern edge of Baghdad, and houses some 750 people in 150 trailers."** [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/02/23/world/middleeast/20090223WIDOWS_2.html]

Since the inception of Operation Iraqi Freedom, there are a lot of concerns that women will be the biggest losers of the war.[61] In 2006 the U.S. State Department established the Office of Women's Affairs in response to concerns of the welfare of women in Iraq and allotted $10 million in support of the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative.[62] However, issues like violence

against women were not highlighted and instead blamed the insurgency as the excuse for not fully addressing the issue.[63] "The Ministry of Women's Affairs estimated that more than 90 women became widows every day in 2006; an estimated 300,000 women in Baghdad and eight million elsewhere in Iraq lack government support and income."[64] The New York Times highlighted in February 2009 a trailer park, Al Waffa, or 'Park of the Grateful,' which houses 750 people, as one of the few aid programs available for an estimated 740,000 Iraqi widows.[65] Only an estimated 120,000 widows receive government aid.[66] They also noted war widows wading through cars near check points in search of money or food, lined up outside mosques for blankets, and rifling through garbage.[67] In addition, some women have turned to prostitution and the insurgency.[68] For widows to receive benefits, they oftentimes need political connections or agree to temporary marriages with men in positions of power who control fund distribution.[69] According to Samira al-Mosawi, Chairwoman of the Women's Affairs Committee in Parliament, "It is blackmail"…"We have no law to treat this point. Widows don't need temporary support, but a permanent solution."[70]



**Picture 3: "Widows and children beneath a photograph of their husbands inside a trailer at Al Waffa. Among Iraqi women aged 15 to 80, 1 in 11 are estimated to be widows."** [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/02/23/world/middleeast/20090223WIDOWS_5.html]

Now internal fissures in Iraq over women's issues have been highlighted in recent months. Iraq's State Minister for Women's Issues, Nawal al-Samarraie, resigned 8 February, 2009, out of protest over lack of support from the Iraqi government.[71] Her monthly budget was cut from $7,500 to $1,500 a month due to a drop in oil prices.[72] However, by mid-March she

withdrew her resignation when Prime Minister Maliki promised Samarraie a more robust budget and more authority.[73] Samarraie highlights that part of the problem is that "Iraq is a patriarchal society, where women are considered adjuncts of their husbands or fathers." She believes the Iraqi government views women's issues as secondary to violence on the street and unemployed men.[74] Despite these notable fissures, issues pertaining to the plight of Iraqi women are much bigger than one woman.

**Picture 4: "Ahmed Hassan Sharmal, right, and his extended family of 30, including three war widows, are forced to share only two trailers."** [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/23/world/middleeast/23widows.html?_r=1&hp]

**Picture 5: 8 February, 2009 Associated Press Interview with Nawal al-Samarraie Announcing Resignation.**

[http://comment-blog.advance.net/cgi-bin/mte/mt-search.cgi?tag=Nawal%20al-Samarraie&IncludeBlogs=4243]
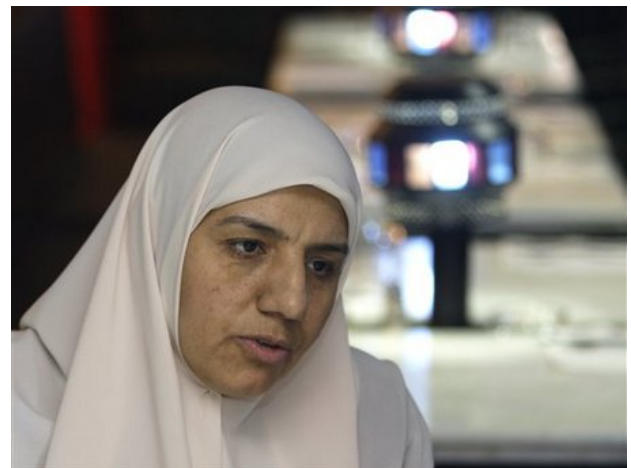
The tenuous security situation in Iraq is of concern to both the Iraqi people and the U.S. as reconstruction efforts are pursued daily.[75] There are fears that violence can be felt by women in the form of assassinations by militias and the enforcement of fatwas on women in a vigilante

fashion.[76] However, fears of violence should not be used by the U.S. administration as an excuse for not fully and properly addressing issues impacting Iraqi women.[77] With the security situation improving, the time is ripe to address the next steps to help support the Iraqi women. By doing so, the joint efforts between the U.S., allies and the Iraqi government can potentially help alleviate future violence. The goal is to establish the conditions necessary for women to flourish in Iraq with hopefully the Iraqi government leading the effort as a visual example and enforcer of practices warranted by the government.

However, the rights of Iraqi women are also at the mercy of the Iraqi government and reverent supporters of shari'a, Islamic law, as the rule of law. Women's roles in society can be threatened by a staunch opposition movement similar to the Islamic system in Iran.[78] After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, debates developed early over whether Islam, therefore shari'a, was to be "the source of law, or a source of law."[79] The majority of Iraqis and Shi'a religious leaders, including Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, supported the placement of shari'a principles into the Iraq Constitution.[80] On 29 December, 2003, in favor of shari'a, the Iraqi Governing Council attempted to pass Resolution 137 to replace Iraq's 1959 Family Law which helped protect women's rights.[81] Subsequently, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Paul Bremer vetoed the resolution.[82]

Nonetheless, in the Iraq Constitution, Article 2 states: "Islam is the official religion of the state and a basic source of legislation."[83]Article 2(A) adds: "No law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established."[84] These articles impact women because they signify that Iraq's civil laws can be overturned by Islamic law.[85] The language used in the Iraq Constitution reveals that it is very possible that Iraq can become an Islamic theocracy, which would be discordant with the efforts to further empower Iraqi women.[86] Nevertheless, even if the

Iraqi people choose to embrace shari'a versus civil law, it is still important to support women's

initiatives. Saudi Arabian Princess Loulwa al-Faisal illustrated that in Saudi Arabia some

women attend universities and own their own businesses all within a system of shari'a; although

she acknowledges there is room for progress.[87]

**Social Indicators – Literacy Rates, School Enrollment, Labor Force, Economic Participation**
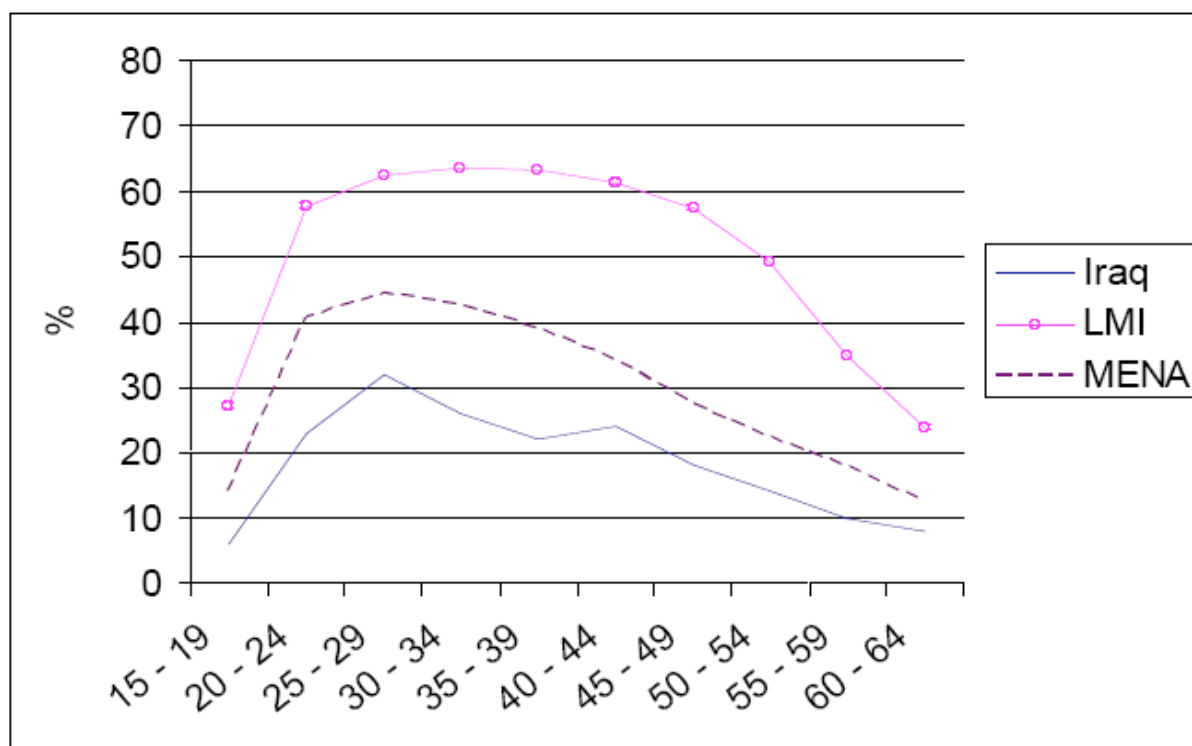


**Figure 3: Female Economic Activity Rates by Age – 2000.**
[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/MENA_Gender_BW2007.pdf]
*Source: World Bank.*
LMI= Lower-middle-income countries
MENA=Middle East North Africa
"Official estimates show that there were approximately 150,000 female headed households in Iraq in 1995. By the end of 2000, that number was estimated to have increased to 300,000."

Despite the Iraq Constitution guaranteeing equal rights for women and children to become literate, the tenuous security issues in Iraq have drastically impaired the ability to attend school and go to work.[88] The World Bank also notes that Iraqi women's socioeconomic advancement is hampered by any laws and practices which require a woman to seek permission from her husband to work, travel or continue her education.[89] During the current reconstruction phase in
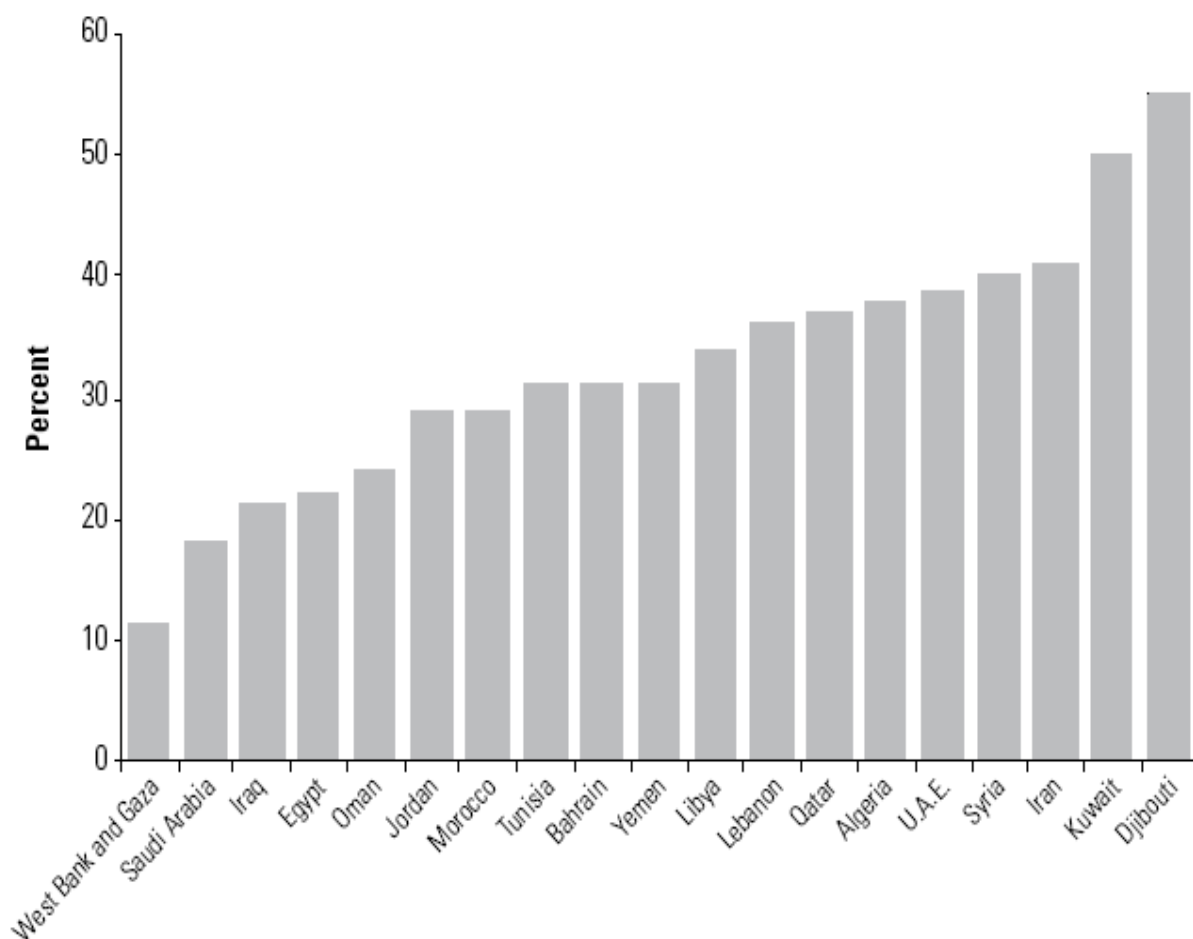


**Figure 4:  Female Labor Force Participation in Country Groups within Middle East and North Africa, 2005 (% of female population ages 15–64).  The data for Iraq is from 2004.** [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/MENA_Gender_BW2007.pdf] *Source: World Bank Central Database (September 2006).*

Iraq, the U.S. needs to promote important steps towards the elimination of constraints placed on a female's education.   Author Moghadam highlights some of the following constraints on

education: the gender gap, costs (need a state directed education system), national education policies (need gender equality), social constraints, geographical distance to schools, recruiting knowledgeable instructors, and the quality of education.[90] The World Bank notes the gender challenges faced during the Iraq reconstruction efforts to include difficulties monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies on women.[91]
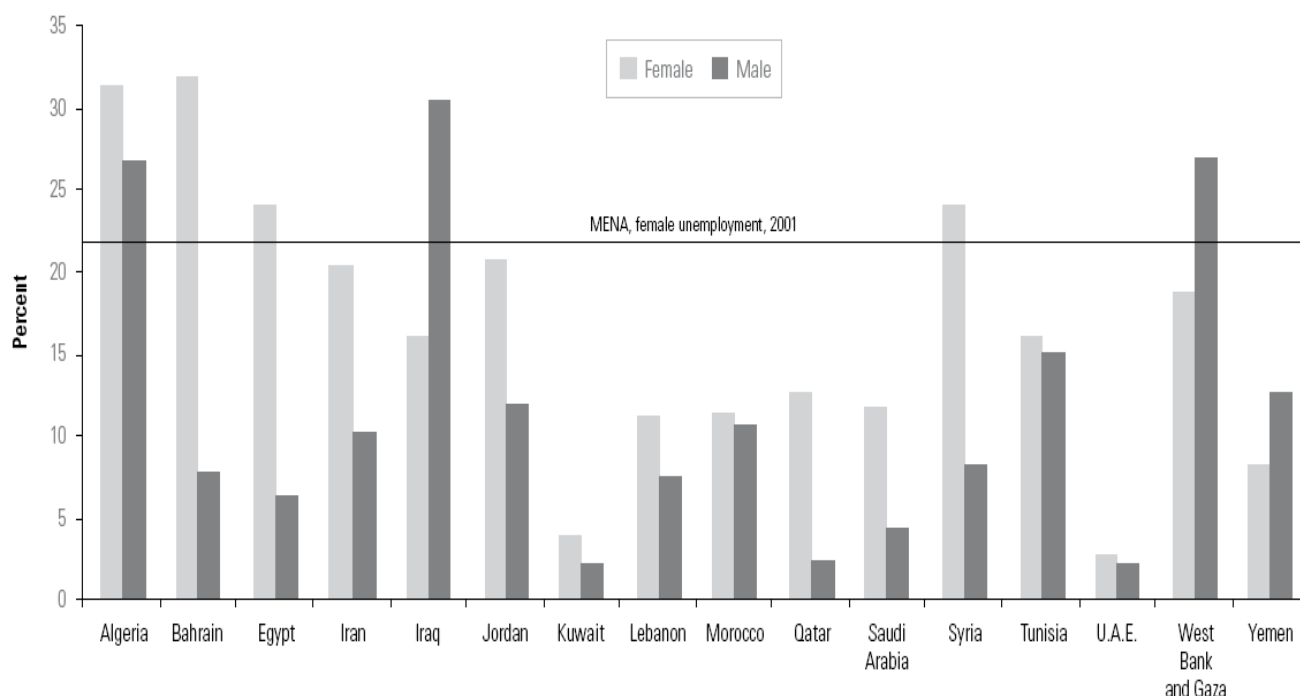


**Figure 5: Male and Female Unemployment Rates in Middle East and North Africa Countries, Most Recent Year (in 2000–2005 time period).**
[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/MENA_Gender_BW2007.pdf] *Source: World Bank Central Database (September 2006).*

The Iraqi government's new constitution and labor law grants women equal rights to an education and employment to include equal rights to literacy, voting and running for public office.[92] In correlation to the fallout of war and disintegration of jobs, World Bank data from 2004 noted that Iraqi men had a much higher unemployment rate than women.[93] The data also

indicates that as of 2004 female headed households are increasing, poverty is high, and women

are faced with less employment pay than men.[94] The World Bank noted:

> Women's share of the total labor force (between the ages 25-45) was only 20 percent in 2004. Labor force participation for women with more than secondary education is the highest (42 percent). The agricultural sector has the largest amount of female labor, 90 percent, double that of men, followed by education (68 percent of all teachers are females) and public administration. Since it is considered as part of their domestic chores, the majority of rural women, 98 percent, work for no wages versus 47 percent for rural men.[95]

The World Bank highlights that a low education and illiteracy are linked to poverty.[96] The World Bank's most recent data from 2004 shows Iraqi adult female literacy at 56 percent compared to male literacy of 74 percent.[97] Iraqi women residing in rural areas were 50 percent illiterate in comparison to the 30 percent in urban areas.[98] However, the younger generation revealed a more promising literacy rate with the ratio of females to males between the ages of 15- to 24-years-old who were literate reaching 91 percent in Iraq in comparison to the 89 percent
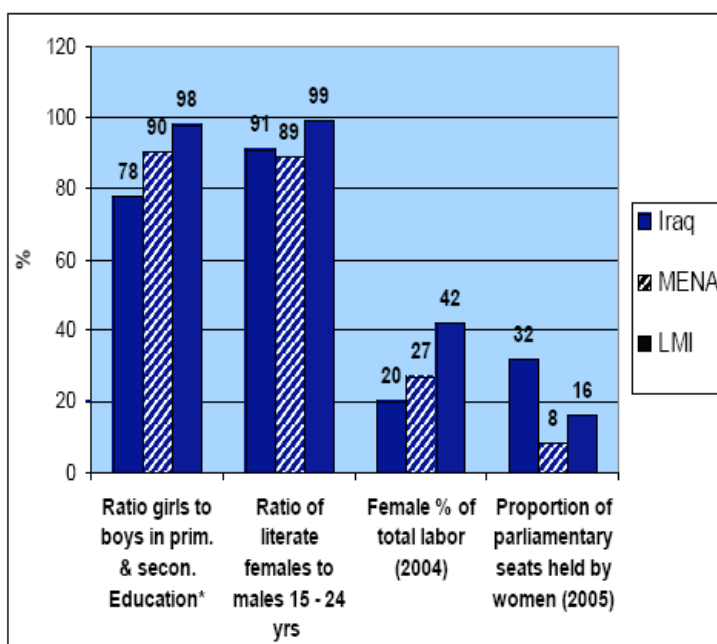


**Figure 6: Promote Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment – 2004; Data for lower-middle-income (LMI) countries is for 2003. Data for Middle East and North Africa and Iraq is 2004.** [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/MENA_Gender_BW2007.pdf]. *Source: World Bank Central database 2006.*

Middle East and North Africa average.[99] The 2003 UN/World Bank Joint Iraq Needs

Assessments indicated that in rural areas only about half of all girls attended school with only 20

percent of women pursuing a technical and vocational level education.[100] The 2004 security

problems impacted access to education, which ultimately impacted women's development more

21

so than men.[101] However, according to the World Bank, "Iraq has made social investments in women, and its legislation gives them equal rights to education, and employment. Iraq's constitution and labor law guarantees the right of work of every citizen regardless of sex."[102]

## Initiatives to Support Iraqi Women's Economic Status

**The Short – and Long-Term Impact of Educating Iraqi Women**

Education is the driving force of change for Iraqi females as well as males. In a post-conflict environment, schools provide a sense of normalcy for children and adults. The value of schools can help keep children engaged in learning versus violent activity, thereby potentially promoting social-economic growth prospects for the family and the nation. Author Moghadam notes, "For many girls and women, schooling and literacy classes are their only exposure to a wider world, where they have contact with a nonfamily institution, receive social recognition, and gain self-confidence and self-esteem."[103]

By a family supporting the education of their girls, they could potentially reap in economic and social benefits, which will improve their living standards. Women's participation in the labor force can ultimately help lift families out of the poverty cycle.[104] The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) research highlights that "educated women are more likely to lead healthier lives and are better able to advocate for themselves and their children and to contribute to the economic and political fabric of society."[105]

There are many familial, social, religious, and cultural constraints placed on women which stifle economic and social progress.[106] Moghadam highlights that "Elimination of these constraints requires (1) equal rights in family law, labor law, and social insurance; (2) public investments to lower the costs of girls' education and women's employment; and (3) proactive

measures and policies to ensure women's access to education and training, paid employment, and social services."[107] One constraint is the costs and tradeoffs to receive an education.[108]

Vocational programs are currently being pursued in the Middle East by external and internal education advocates. David Arnold, president of American University in Cairo and a member of the Association of American International Colleges and Universities, highlighted in April 2008 the initiatives by American universities to include Georgetown and Cornell, to establish campuses in the Middle East to educate both men and women.[109] The universities are welcomed by some Arab leaders who realize the correlation of a higher education and economic progress and a betterment of civil society.[110] Arnold highlights that, "Those of us involved in higher education in this region believe that as we teach young leaders to embrace rigorous analysis and intellectual tolerance, radicalism can be trumped. Conversely, if higher education fails to provide the abilities young Arabs need to succeed in modern society, hopes will be dimmed, and minds closed." [111]

Similar vocational initiatives are currently being pursued in Iraq, with studies focusing on the creation of a new Iraq; however, these initiatives can receive greater traction if universities like Cornell and Georgetown invest their efforts in Iraq. One such



**Picture 6: Iraq University College in Basra Students.**
[http://www.iraquniversity.net/about.html]

university is the Iraq University College in Basra, which is a private university, founded 25 May

2005.[112] The American University of Iraq - Sulaimani is another example of an ambitious initiative to help students become more active participants in the rebuilding of their nation. Since it was founded in late 2007, its enrollment jumped from 48 students to 256 in one year.[113] According to one 19-year-old student Deaa Delawar, "The students at state university have to memorize the curriculum but here it is different. We study some subjects outside the curriculum. These are really interesting studies that push you to work hard."[114]

As the security situation continues to improve in Iraq, more and more corporations will likely reach out to help develop Iraq in order to eventually reap in the financial benefits. In March 2008 Goldman Sachs & Company announced and continues to advertise that they will donate $100 million in support of an opportunity for 10,000 women to receive a business degree and to advance business education programs at universities in the Middle East and in Africa.[115] Goldman's chairman and chief executive, Lloyd C. Blankfein believes that "no country will ever achieve its full potential if half of its talent pool is stymied or underrepresented."[116]



**Picture 7: The American University of Iraq – Sulaimani Students.**
[http://www.auis.org/index.php/Student-Life.html]

**Initiatives to Help Train Iraqi Women Skill-Sets Needed for Work Placement**

By supporting educational and vocational training initiatives as well as micro-lending programs, the Iraqi women are ultimately given a chance to help bolster the economic standings of their country as well as their own. Zainab Salbi, the cofounder of the non-profit organization *Women for Women*, points out that "with such tools at her disposal a woman changes from victim to survivor to active citizen."[117] Out of fear of restrictions placed on women's rights, Salbi recognizes the urgency in ensuring the Iraqi women are properly represented and representing themselves in the post-conflict environment.[118] She also recognizes that "micro issues" can bring more tangible results in a quicker manner.[119] *Women for Women* is working with Iraqi women by offering them training in civil rights, and education and micro-credit support for small businesses.[120]

The 2007 surge in Iraq provided the dire security needed, which helped bolster community engagement with the various sectarian factions for a common purpose of economic development to help ensure peace.[121] As of July 2008, the U.S. State Department's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative (IWDI) helped 7,000 women receive training in several key areas to include: "leadership, political participation, entrepreneurship, media skills, women's rights advocacy, coalition building, negotiation, and training on Iraqi women's constitutional rights."[122] One area IWDI supports is the promotion of widowed women to pursue entrepreneurship.[123] This project helps empower women to become economically self-sufficient by helping them acquire the necessary skills to thrive in the workforce.[124] Subsequently, women learning more about their rights will likely help contribute to the overall economic development of Iraq.[125]

At the grassroots level, NGOs are actively pursuing training initiatives to help strengthen Iraqi women. Since the 2003 U.S. invasion into Iraq, organizations like the United States Institute for Peace and the Women's Alliance for a Free and Democratic Iraq have sponsored training sessions to help bolster the Iraqi women and their rights.[126] The U.S. Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs announced 28 June, 2007 the establishment of the U.S-Iraqi Businesswomen's Partnership, to bring U.S. and Iraqi female entrepreneurs together in a six-month virtual mentoring program in order to exchange insights and advice.[127] The State Department is onboard to support both private industry and NGO partners in order to help reach out to Iraqi women and to support program success.[128] In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) announced in May 2008 its progress with the Agribusiness Program, 'Inma,' which is helping with the economic recovery of Balad by granting $5 million to restart operations at the Balad Canning Factory.[129] Of the 1,000 Sunni and Shi'a hired at the factory, 200 are women.[130]

**The Impact of Micro-Lending Programs to Help Bolster the Status of Women in Iraq**

Micro-lending and micro-crediting programs are underway in Iraq to help poor people have the necessary resources to become self-employed in order to help build an income thereby breaking away from poverty and contributing to the economic growth of the nation. Micro-lending and micro-crediting programs have proven to be extremely successful in Muslim nations to include Bangladesh. Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank Project and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his micro-loan project, which began over 30 years ago in Bangladesh, provides great insight as to why micro-lending and micro-crediting programs prove to be successful with women.[131] Yunus explained in a 2008 interview that "microcredit is lending money to the poorest people without collateral, without guarantee, without any lawyers

in between, so that people can take money and create income-generating activity and improve their income situation and get out of poverty."[132] Of the 7.5 million borrowers in Bangladesh since 1976, 97 percent are women.[133] Yunus highlights that the very little money loaned to a woman results in remarkably high repayment rates and can make a huge difference in a woman's life by helping her break out of poverty.[134] In addition, during the 30 years of operation of Yunus' Grameen Bank, close to 100 percent of the women's children attended school.[135]

Iraqi women can benefit from these programs if they are encouraged locally and nationally. One example is USAID's micro-lending program in Iraq. USAID announced in March 2008 that its private-sector development program in, referred to as *Izdihar* (prosperity), has provided over $150 million in micro-loans since 2003.[136] With a 99% payback rate, the loans ranging from $500 to $3,000 are used to help start or expand small businesses.[137]

> USAID's micro-loan program is administered by a network of nine microfinance institutions that Izdihar has supported through infusions of loan capital, technical assistance, and training for loan officers. Six of the nine are Iraqi-owned organizations that *Izdihar* helped to establish to meet the growing demand for small loans throughout Iraq. Many of the microfinance institutions operate several branches within a particular region to ensure accessibility to communities seeking resources for economic revitalization.[138]

In January 2008 at the 3rd Businesswomen Forum in Islamic Countries, entrepreneurs met to discuss the possibilities for Islamic governments to support women in business in order to help empower women as well as significantly contribute to national economies.[139] Among the suggestions discussed at the meeting held in Doha, Qatar included asking Islamic banks' support for micro-credit financing.[140] During the seminar it was noted that women-run businesses in Islamic countries were less than 10% in comparison to Europe (24%) and Asia (23%).[141]

## The Empowerment of Iraqi Women – A Way Forward

By a mother raising good children, she raises a nation.

—Major Mohammad Alqadfan
Kuwait International Officer, Air Command and Staff College 2008[142]

**Conclusions/Recommendations**

In an effort to help combat extremist and criminal acts and behavior in Iraq, it is imperative that the United States supports Iraqi women via vocational and micro-lending programs in hopes of influencing and shaping the mindsets of her children and that of future generations. Support for Iraqi women is needed foremost from the Iraqi government. Vocational and micro-lending programs geared towards women need to be viewed as legitimate and openly supported by the government, which will require an information campaign espousing its benefits from the top echelons of government down to the grassroots level in each village and city. The U.S. government can work through the Iraqi government, NGOs, IGOs, allies and private industry to help provide the resources needed for the vitality and longevity of the programs. Although Iraqi men may not be that yielding to programs supporting women's empowerment, they may support the financial gains of having a second income. Allowing Iraqi women to work and receive an education was acceptable during Saddam Hussein's reign and should certainly be acceptable in Iraq today. Middle Eastern women, regardless of culture, want a better life for their children. Women are the nurturers and teachers and can help set the example for their children to follow.

By affording Iraqi women training opportunities to gain the necessary skills needed for an income, it helps move women out of survival mode and complacency and into the realm of possibilities. Programs which help to empower women give a woman a sense of purpose and hope. Funding is necessary; however, in comparison to costly weapons, which may provoke

deadly consequences and ignite further acts of terrorism, there is no match for programs like

micro-lending which requires very little money and can help discourage people from turning

towards terrorist acts in the long-run. These non-kinetic efforts are needed in order to sow the

seeds of a new direction for the next generation. It may take a generation to see the results of the

efforts put forth in the empowerment of Iraqi women, but in the long-run the Iraqi citizens and

the world would benefit from a stable and prosperous Iraq.

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